



CATAWBA COUNTY

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ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AGENCY (EPA) TO CLASSIFY CATAWBA COUNTY AS “IN ATTAINMENT” FOR PARTICULATE MATTER (PM 2.5)

The United States Environmental Planning Agency (USEPA) has announced that Catawba County will be classified as “attainment” from its current “nonattainment” designation for Particulate Matter 2.5 (PM 2.5) on December 19, 2011. Catawba County was officially declared in nonattainment for PM 2.5 on January 5, 2005. The redesignation back to attainment for PM 2.5 shows that the dedication of the Unifour Air Quality Oversight Committee (UAQOC) and Unifour Air Quality Committee (UAQC) to improve air quality in the Hickory Metro (Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties) has been successful as the region’s PM monitor’s values have fallen well below the current annual standard of 15 micrograms of PM 2.5 per cubic meter. In fact, the current 3-year average (2008-2010) has dropped to just 11.4 micrograms per cubic meter. Substantial pollution control improvements to Duke Energy’s Marshall Steam Station also contributed to the reduction in PM 2.5.

PM 2.5 (fine particle pollution) refers to tiny particles of droplets in the air that are two and one half microns or less in width. Two and one half microns is about thirty times smaller than the width of a human hair. There are indoor and outdoor sources of fine particles. Outside, fine particles primarily come from car, truck, bus and off-road vehicle exhausts. Other outside sources are those that involve the burning of fuels such as wood, heating oil or coal and natural sources such as forest and grass fires. Fine particles also form from the reaction of gases or droplets in the atmosphere from sources such as power plants. Some indoor sources are tobacco smoke and wood or kerosene heaters.

The UAQOC consists of ten (10) elected officials from throughout the Hickory Metro and is chaired by Catawba County Board of Commissioners Chair, Kitty Barnes. The UAQC’s membership consists of representatives from the public and private sector and is chaired by Doug Urland, Catawba County Director of Public Health. Both committees are staffed by the Western Piedmont Council of Governments.

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